



NEWS FROM THE OFFICE OF ULSTER COUNTY EXECUTIVE MIKE HEIN



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THE S.T.R.I.V.E PROJECT: SHARED TAXPAYER RELIEF THROUGH INNOVATIVE VISIONS IN EDUCATION

Ulster County Executive Mike Hein announces a transformative plan that saves \$21.6 million

Kingston, N.Y. – Today, Ulster County Executive Mike Hein unveiled a transformative plan for collaboration that provides enhanced educational opportunities while saving taxpayers millions. The STRIVE Project will improve access to higher education, place surplus County buildings back on the tax rolls, repurpose an elementary school that would otherwise become vacant, provide a single point of access to Ulster County's health and human services and provide better educational opportunities for less money. The initiative will save more than \$21.6 million over the next decade.

SUNY Ulster President Don Katt said, "The County Executive's proposal could not have come at a better time. It's a stroke of genius. Not only did he propose the plan to both the college and the school district, but he quickly brokered the two institutions in realizing the benefits to both organizations. The college is excited with the location and its proximity to the Kingston High School and the hospitals. This proposal is a win for the college, the County, the school district, the students and our collective taxpayers."

The S.T.R.I.V.E. Project – Strategic Taxpayer Relief through Innovative Visions in Education is:

- A multifaceted plan that creates an educational corridor in the center of Kingston greatly improving access to higher education;
- A coordinated plan that provides enhanced access to health and human services through the centralization of multiple County departments; and
- A plan that will save \$21.6 million over the next decade.

The S.T.R.I.V.E Project will relocate the SUNY Ulster satellite campus from its current location at the Business Resource Center (BRC) to what is now the Sophie Finn Elementary School in Kingston, which has been proposed for closure by the school superintendent. Located approximately 100 yards from the Kingston High School, the new college satellite will improve access to higher education for high school students and adult learners, many of whom could walk to the campus or access it by public transportation.

Kingston City School District Superintendent Dr. Paul J. Paladino said, "The S.T.R.I.V.E Project is a bright ray of light during a very difficult time, not only for the students and their parents but also for all of the residents of Ulster County. This plan provides valuable access to all classes, saves the district money, which will ultimately protect the many valuable programs that KCSD provides."

The Kingston City School District has said it must restructure by consolidating multiple schools to respond to the current enrollment decline throughout the district and to eliminate budget deficits which continue to increase. Enrollment in the Kingston district has declined by roughly 15 percent over the past decade.

“The S.T.R.I.V.E Project will create an educational corridor in the center of Kingston, greatly improving access to higher education,” said Ulster County Executive Mike Hein. “By moving SUNY Ulster’s satellite campus to Sophie Finn Elementary we can prevent another empty school building, improve education, enhance the delivery of County services and save the taxpayers \$21.6 million over the next decade. This plan rethinks traditional boundaries, challenges the status quo and places the interests of our students and taxpayers above all else. And regardless of where in Ulster County you live, the S.T.R.I.V.E. Project benefits you.”

“I am excited about this plan and I look forward to working with the County Executive to make this a reality,” said City of Kingston Mayor Shayne Gallo.

Ulster County Legislator Wayne Harris, Chairman of the Legislative Programs, Education and Community Services Committee, said, “Having spent my career in education and having served as Principal of the George Washington Elementary School, I believe that County Executive Hein’s plan is exactly the kind of “out of the box” thinking needed to help reform education.”

By better utilizing the BRC, the County will centralize health and human services which will provide better access for all County residents while saving money. The Office for the Aging, Office for Employment and Training, Health Department, Mental Health Department, Information Services, Youth Bureau, Veterans Service Agency and Human Rights Commission will all be co-located to create a single point of access.

The consolidation would also allow for the sale of two county-owned properties: (1) at 300 Flatbush Avenue and (2) 25 South Manor Avenue. The sale of these two buildings will eliminate approximately \$319,000 in operational costs and may generate revenue of \$2,000,000 in sale proceeds. Additionally, by returning two properties back to the tax rolls, there will be an estimated \$95,000 in new property taxes paid to the City of Kingston, the Kingston Central School District and Ulster County, benefiting everyone.

County Executive Hein continued, “This unique and innovative plan delivers what many thought was impossible: it balances our need for high quality education with our need to protect taxpayers.”

The S.T.R.I.V.E Project will require capital improvements to the current school structure that would prepare it to host college programs by January of 2014. Those improvements will cost an estimated \$4.47 million. The project envisions construction to start in June 2013. The project will require the approval of the Ulster County Legislature, the SUNY Ulster Board of Trustees and the Kingston City School District Board of Education.

The SUNY Capital Projects Fund will cover 50% of the capital improvement costs. In addition, we are enormously grateful that the Governor’s office has committed to identifying funding sources to

ensure that no additional local tax dollars will be needed. Also, the Dyson Foundation has acknowledged the value and the transformative nature of this project. We are greatly appreciative that they share our vision and will provide \$500,000 to make this project a reality.

This thoughtful investment in our future will provide long term benefits throughout Ulster County, as the college satellite will enhance access to educational opportunities for students of every age and income level. High school students will have more access to advanced placement courses and preparatory classes. Adult learners will have easier access to courses that have helped many start new careers.

Ease of access is a critical component of the S.T.R.I.V.E Project. About 59 percent of Kingston residents have no college degree. Recent Census data shows that 10 percent of city residents are living below the poverty level. By bringing SUNY Ulster into Midtown Kingston, the S.T.R.I.V.E. Project aims to reach more city residents and improve their overall quality of life.

David Donaldson, Ulster County Legislature's Minority Leader. Deputy Chair of the Legislative Programs, Education and Community Services Committee and a high school teacher, said, "This is a thrilling opportunity for the people in the midtown area and all of Kingston, some of whom may have been less likely to go to college without this program. At the same time that it will rejuvenate this corridor in Kingston, it will save all of Ulster County's taxpayers' money.

Peter M. Loughran, Ulster County Legislator from the City of Kingston, said, "I am amazed by County Executive Hein's plan. This is a wonderful opportunity for all of the students who attend Kingston High School. They will have direct access to a first rate community college education."

Jeanette Provenzano, Ulster County Legislator from the City of Kingston, said, "This is the most exciting positive news that I have heard in a very long time. It is a shining example of all facets of government working together. This is one project that I am positively enthused will be a bipartisan venture within the Ulster County Legislature."

Hudson Valley Pattern for Progress is a regional planning, research and policy nonprofit which recently authored a study about the valley's school enrollment dilemma. The report, "Closed School, Open Minds," showed that 25 school buildings in the Hudson Valley have closed in recent years because of enrollment decline.

"County Executive Mike Hein's leadership and vision in proposing the S.T.R.I.V.E. Project exhibits the difference between accepting a problem and creating a solution," Pattern for Progress President & CEO Jonathan Drapkin said. "This is an example of an outstanding adaptive reuse of an educational facility. This innovative plan should become a model throughout New York State. This is what real reform looks like."

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Attachment: The S.T.R.I.V.E Project slideshow